

Beginner Dance Party Success

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When we call beginner dance parties and community dances, I believe we need to do our best to see that the dancers are dancing in a win-win situation. One of the ways we can help them succeed is to not expect them to do the correct thing with just verbal instructions. We should provide them with physical and visual clues along with spoken instructions.

As an example, when we ask the dancers to **Circle Left** or **Circle Right** we need to tell the dancers to first join hands. Most of the time they will join hands with the people on either side of them, but occasionally some “wag” will join their own hands. Maybe a better wording would be to “take hands” and then demonstrate the action from a position in the circle.

When you call **Forward & Back** it helps to tell the dancers to go **Forward** three steps and stamp and then **Back** up three steps and clap their hands together once. This tells the dancers how far to move **Forward** and **Back** and there is an audible clue created by the stamping foot and hand claps that tells them when they have done it correctly.

I like to use some "Basics" more than others. I refer to them as “Assisted Movement Basics”. The action of joining hands in a **Circle** with the people on either side allows adjacent dancers to “assist” each other. The chances are greater that someone in each group of three people linked together by joined hands will do the movement correctly.

Watch sometime when you tell the dancers to go **Forward and Back** in a big circle at a beginner party. Some dancers will be lagging behind other dancers. If the **Circle** did not have joined hands, some dancers would just stand there if they did not have the assistance from the adjoining dancers.

OK! What does this tell you as an instructor? Have everybody go **Forward and Back** in a circle with joined hands before you try to have the ladies or and men go **Forward & Back** as individuals. Be sure they know how far to move. Three steps **Forward** and stamp and three steps **Back** and clap works well. Three steps **Forward** and say “Hey” and three steps **Back** and say “Whoa” does the same thing and provides variety.

Many people learn by watching what other people are doing. You can see them look around after you have spoken a command and then mimic what the other dancers are doing. They learn by watching others, not by trying to follow the caller’s spoken instructions.

The third “Basic” on the CALLERLAB teaching order is **DoSaDo (#3)**. I feel this is an unassisted “Basic” This makes it harder for the dancers to learn. To dance a **DoSaDo** correctly, two dancers must move independently in a closely coordinated action around each other. At one position in this action, they cannot see the other dancer. If either one is moving incorrectly, the usual result is the bumping of bodies. In my opinion, **DoSaDo** is an “unassisted dance movement” that should be avoided until the dancers have learned to listen to verbal instructions better.

I seldom use **DoSaDo** at a beginner dance party. I don’t need it. If you feel obligated to use it because it is such a recognized part of the square dance language, I suggest that you at least wait until the end of the program (evening) to insert it. I would never put it in the first tip.

Arms Turns (#6) are very useful. I demonstrate the forearm grip as I give the verbal instructions. They both see and hear what I want them to do. **Arm Turns** are an “assisted

basic”. Usually at least one person of the pair that are dancing the **Arm Turn** already knows what to do or understood the demonstration described above. They can assist the dancers that haven’t understood what you are saying or paid attention to the demonstration. Let’s face it folks, there are people at every dance that do not listen well or watch well. They have to be physically shown what to do. That means take them by the hand or arm and help them to move correctly.

The next question I’m sure some of you will ask is why not do as CALLERLAB recommends and teach **Allemande Left (#4)** first. **Arm Turns (#5)** are easier to teach to beginner dancers and are a lot more useful than **Left Allemande (#4)**.

To teach **Allemande Left** you have to show the dancers what an **Arm Turn** looks like. Why confuse them with two commands for a “basic” movement that are the same movement? I don’t teach beginners any more than just what they need to know to dance one evening of dancing.

These are all parts of achieving the win-win goal for a beginner dance party. Use every possible trick-of-the-trade to ensure that what you teach them is understood correctly. Beginner dancers are there to have fun, not to become accomplished polished square dancers. Let them have the maximum amount of fun dancing with the least amount of time being instructed.